DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 205 260 PS 012 007

AUTHOR Furstenberg, Frank F., Jr.
TITLE Teenage Parenthood and Family Support.
PUB DATE Apr 80
NOTE 27p.: Paper presented at the Research Forum on Family Issues, National Advisory Committee of the White House Conference on Families (Washington, DC, April 10-11, 1980).

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Adolescents; *Extended Family; *Family Influence; Family Life; Group Unity; *Marriage; Mothers; *Parent Child Relationship; *Pregnant Students; Quality of Life; Secondary Education; Unwed Mothers
IDENTIFIERS *Early Parenthood

ABSTRACT

Today, among adolescents, childbearing may precede rather than follow marriage. Evidence suggests that adolescent childbearers now rely heavily on their families to provide needed support. Among a sample of 320 adolescent, mostly black mothers from low-income families, most spent a majority of their early years of parenthood in an extended family arrangement, and nearly half were living with kin after 5 years. Research has shown that marriage, whether it occurs before or after the child is born, offers very little protection to teenage mothers: young mothers who remained single were better off than those who married, receiving more financial and emotional support from their kin. There is some evidence that family support buffers the impact of single parenthood for the offspring as well. Non-conclusive findings of case studies of families with pregnant adolescents suggest that the pregnant adolescent's status in her family improves after the child is born, that paternal involvement in child rearing is often precluded by the mother's family, and that parenting duties are shared by members of the mother's household. However, these conditions in the family may be neither consistent nor continuous. (In conclusion, tentative recommendations for policy makers are advanced.) (Author/RH)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED205260

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

TEENAGE PARENTHOOD AND FAMILY SUPPORT*

FRANK F. FURSTENBERG, JR.

Paper Prepared for the
National Research Forum on Family Issues
Sponsored by the
White House Conference on Families
Washington, D.C.
April 10-11, 1980

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Frank F. Furstenberg
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

*This paper summarizes and draws sections from several previous papers reporting on research results of a project sponsored by the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development.

Complete references to earlier publications can be found in the bibliography.

PS012007

TEENAGE PARENTHOOD AND FAMILY SUPPORT

Introduction

Teenage childbearing has aroused great concern in recent years because many experts believe that it is a source of both immediate and prolonged family instability. Abundant empirical evidence shows that women who become mothers during their teens, especially in their mid-teens, are far more likely than older mothers to encounter an array of medical, social, and economic problems during the transition to parenthood. Medical risks during pregnancy are generally higher for young mothers; they are more likely to discontinue their education than women who delay childbearing until their twenties; and they are forced to rely on public assistance more often, in large measure because they are usually unmarried at childbirth.

Findings from retrospective and longitudinal studies indicate that the life chances of young mothers do not improve over time. In later life, they are much less likely to be living in couple-headed households and hence are more likely to be in an economically precarious position. Teenage mothers also have a more difficult time limiting subsequent unwanted pregnancies. Despite the fact that they are more likely to end up as single parents, their family size, on the average, is larger than that of their counterparts who defer childbearing. This further constricts their opportunities to enter the labor market and find remunerative employment. In sum, there seems little doubt that early childbearing handicaps individuals who are often already disadvantaged by poverty and racial discrimination. (For recent reviews of

the literature, see Baldwin, 1976; Chilman, 1978; Furstenberg, Lincoln and Menken, in press.)

Yet in reviewing the evidence on early childbearing, one is continually struck by the diversity in the life circumstances of teenage childbearers. While it is certainly true that women who become mothers early in life do not fare as well as those who manage to postpone parenthood, the fact remains that a substantial proportion of teenage parents successfully cope with the challenge of early and unplanned childbirth. Not all young mothers, perhaps not even a majority, end up as high school dropouts, welfare dependents, or single parents burdened with unwanted children. Many become successful and productive members of the community. Researchers have given too little attention to how teenage parents make do with existing public and private resources as they negotiate the passage to parenthood.

The objective of this paper is to examine what may be the most valuable resource to young parents, the family. I will try to show how family members help young parents to manage premature parenthood. In describing the family's involvement, I shall also discuss how early parenthood affects the kin who become involved in rendering assistance. In the conclusion of this paper, I shall point out some of the implications of patterns of family support for practionners and planners who design services to aid the adolescent parent.

At the outset of this review, I must take note of the fact that very little has been written on the role of the family in cushioning the impact of early childbearing. As I have observed elsewhere (Furstenberg, 1980a).

> ...the American ethos of individualism pervades our notions of how social problems come about as well as how we go about dealing with them. Researchers are trained to study individuals, not families; policies and programs are designed to serve individuals, not families. In the case of early childbearing, we prefer to act as though the adolescent mother is solely responsible for the problem, and accordingly single her out for attention.

Thus, one can only find a handful of studies which have examined how families aid the young parent and how this support affects the adjustment of the young mother and her family. (Ooms and Maciocha [1979] have discussed the paucity of studies on this topic and Ooms [in press] has recently assembled a volume of papers on the impact of teenage childbearing on the family.

Demographic Trends in Teenage Fertility

Even in the absence of detailed information on the family's involvement in teenage childbearing, the demographic trends relating to teenage fertility provide some interesting clues as to why families might become implicated when a pregnancy occurs. Sexual activity is occurring at earlier ages, exposing adolescents to the risk of pregnancy (Zelnik and Kantner, 1977). Increasingly too, early childbearing is taking place outside of marriage, placing the young mother and her child in a socially and economically vulnerable position.

Teenage childbearing is hardly new to American society. Although never as common as is typically imagined, it is nonetheless true that in previous times a small minority of women married and bore children in their early teens, and it was not at all unusual for women to begin childbearing in their late teens. In some rural communities, pregnancy before marriage was probably quite common and

even given unofficial approval, though childbearing outside of marriage has always received public opprobrium. In times past, it is clear, families typically extended a great deal of support, such as room and board, to young married couples. Well into the twentieth century, the practice of "doubling up" was common, especially among newlyweds for the first few years of married life (Modell, Furstenberg and Strong, 1978).

This traditional pattern of family formation remained undisturbed until relatively recently. During the baby boom, unprecedented numbers of teenagers married and started families early in life. Both marriage and childbearing before age 18 increased as younger women, like their older sisters, participated in the "marriage rush" following World War II. In the post-war period, the proportion of teens marrying jumped by more than 50 percent and childbearing rates climbed accordingly (Sklar and Berkov, 1974). No doubt some of this increase can be explained by changing patterns of sexual behavior. Premarital conceptions undoubtedly hastened the schedule of family formation for a number of teenagers, though the proportion of premarital conceptions among women having their first birth did not change noticeably until after the baby boom had peaked (O'Connell and Moore, 1980).

As the birth rate began to fall, the behavior of teenagers began to depart from both the traditional pattern of family formation and the typical pattern of older women. In the first place, teenage childbearing declined much less sharply than the fertility of older women. Second, teenagers increasingly became pregnant before marriage and in greater proportions deferred marriage even after the child was born. Third, younger teenagers became far more vulnerable to

pregnancy and childbirth outside of marriage. The rate of out-of-wedlock childbearing for teenagers actually increased while marital fertility among older women sharply dropped off (O'Connell and Moore, 1980).

To sum up, an historical pattern has been reversed in the past half century. Whereas once teenage fertility occurred primarily after marriage, just the opposite is true today. In recent years, the great majority of all first births to females under the age of 20 have been conceived outside of marriage, and more than a third of these mothers are single when their first child is born. In the past decade alone, the ratio of out-of-wedlock births to total births among teenagers has doubled, from 20.8 percent in 1965 to 42.9 percent in 1977. Well over half of all childbearers under the age of 18 have their child outside of marriage (Furstenberg, Lincoln and Menken, in press).

Thus, we see that the character of teenage childbearing has changed dramatically over the past few decades. Today, as never before, teenage childbearing diverges from the conventional sequence of family formation: among adolescents, childbearing precedes rather than follows marriage. Indeed, given the rising skepticism about early marriage, possibly due to the declining position of young males in the labor market and the rising occupational aspirations of females, a growing proportion of early childbearers are likely to defer marriage or even postpone it indefinitely after their first child is born.

What happens to young mothers who elect not to marry for a period of time after their child is born? Are single parents and

their children at special risk by virtue of their decision to forego marriage? Based on evidence from diverse sources, it would appear that single parents do not necessarily fare worse than their peers who marry precipitiously following an unplanned pregnancy. Children of teenage parents often do as well when their parents remain single as when they marry, though the available data is quite limited. As I shall show, fragmentary evidence from a variety of sources seems to suggest that adolescent childbearers rely heavily on their family of origin to provide support that was once available from marriage.

Patterns of Adaptation to Early Parenthood

From 1967 to 1972, I carried out a longitudinal study of teenage mothers in Baltimore, Maryland. Since this research has been described elsewhere, I will not go into the specifics of the research design here. Some 320 adolescent mothers, mostly black and from low-income families, were followed for a period of five years after their first child was born. I was particularly interested in the impact of the unplanned pregnancy on their subsequent marital, fertility, and economic behavior and on the welfare of their offspring. To make a long story very short, I discovered that, in general, marriage offered very little protection to either the young mothers or their children. The marriages which occurred, whether they took place before or after the child was born, with the father of the child or someone else, generally did not even survive through the five years of the study (Furstenberg, 1976).

When marriages did succeed, the young mothers were, relatively speaking, economically well off. Indeed, they were indistinguishable

from their classmates who married later in life and did not bear their first child until after they were wed. The children of the stably married also scored highest on tests of cognitive and social development and were reported by their parents to have the fewest problems. Contact between fathers and children was most intense among the stably married, and mothers reported a high level of gratification in the child's relationship to his or her father. However, only a fifth of the entire sample were married to the child's father at the conclusion of the study, five years after delivery. It is highly unlikely that all, or even most, of these marriages would survive the next fifteen years, the time when the child will reach adulthood.

A different picture emerges when we contrast the experiences of the formerly married mothers with those who did not wed during the course of the study. In virtually all areas, the young mothers who remained single throughout the study were better off than those who had been previously married. The unmarried mothers were more likely to have graduated from high school, more of them were employed, fewer were receiving public assistance, not as many had experienced additional unwanted pregnancies, and the never-married women appeared to be more confident and successful parents.

In general, the children of the never-married mothers fared at least as well as those whose parents had married but were no longer living together. Ironically, the children of never-married parents were about as likely to see their fathers on a regular basis as those whose parents had been previously married. In each situation, roughly a quarter of the fathers visited their child at least weekly. About a

third of the males extended some economic support, regardless of whether they had been married to the child's mother. Finally, the mothers reported that the single fathers enjoyed closer relations to their children than the previously married fathers. As I have written elsewhere,

> ...the formerly-married fathers were at a certain disadvantage in comparison to the never-married males. More was expected of them because they had provided more in the past. By contrast, something of a sliding scale operated for the never-married males. Whatever they contributed was valued that much more because it was less taken for granted (Furstenberg, 1980b).

By focusing on the unstable marital careers of the teenage childbearers, we see the dark lines of the picture. Women enter marriage hoping to restore order to the process of family formation, only to discover that their effort to do so has made matters worse. Interestingly, most of the young mothers had been forewarned of this possibility by their parents, many of whom had taken the same unrewarding route in early life. In the initial set of interviews conducted with the mothers of the pregnant teenagers, many parents strongly voiced the opinion that it would be a mistake for their daughters to marry merely because they were pregnant. While almost all hoped that their daughter would eventually wed, fewer than one in five thought it would be desirable for her to marry before her twenties. We were repeatedly told:

> She'll have enough time for that. I want her to stay in school so she won't have to be dependent when she grows up. She can stay with us until she completes her education.

In fact, almost all of the teenagers who elected to defer marriage remained with their parents. One year after delivery, nearly two-thirds were still unmarried; almost all of these young mothers (92 percent) were living with their parents or other extended kin. It is also noteworthy that nearly half of those currently married were still living with one or more family members, usually their parents.

Gradually, over the duration of the study, more of the young mothers entered marriage and established a separate household. But even at the five year follow up, when most of the women were in their early twenties, a substantial minority remained with their family of origin. Among the women who remained unwed, seven out of ten continued to reside with parents or other relatives. Half of the formerly married had moved back with their families, refugees from an unsuccessful marriage. And, nearly one in five of those currently married shared a household with their family. In sum, most of the young mothers spent a majority of their early years of parenthood in an extended family arrangement; and nearly half were living with kin at the five year follow up. More were living with their parents than with mates at the conclusion of the study, a pattern that is not likely to change greatly in years to follow.

The data from Baltimore undoubtedly overstate, to some degree, the extent to which adolescent parents rely on their family for support during the transition to parenthood. The participants in our study were almost all low-income blacks. (The few whites in the sample became pregnant at a somewhat older age and tended to marry soon after conception occurred.) Most likely, a higher proportion of white than black

teenagers elect to establish their own household in the event that they do not wed. Nevertheless, since a disproportionate number of younger teens are non-white, the trend observed in the Baltimore data is probably common, if not universal.

When we look at what the family had to offer the fledgling parent, it is easy to understand why so many of them elected to remain with their parents or to return to live with them after their marriages broke up. The Baltimore study indicates that young mothers who leave home receive lower amounts of financial and emotional support from their kin. Thus, moving was often a response to a limited flow of aid and in turn closed off existing avenues of support such as childcare, free room and board, and other forms of material aid. Lest I exaggerate the findings, it is important to note that many mothers who set up a separate household continued to receive support from their relatives, but at a lower level than those who remained in the home. Given the material as well as psychological cost of moving out, many young mothers elected to stay close to the supply of support. Significantly, our data bely the popular stereotype of the single parent isolated from a system of family support.

In a separate analysis of data on women in Camden, New Jersey, it appears that those women living without mates are more likely to augment their networks with relatives and friends, much as the young mothers in our Baltimore study did (Crawford and Furstenberg, 1979). It might be said that extended family ties compensate, to a certain degree, for weak conjugal ties.

Given these additional sources of aid, it comes as no surprise to discover that teenage parents who remained with their families were more likely than those who were living alone to complete high school, find a job, and avoid depending on public assistance. It is, of course, an open question whether the women who lived with their families made out better because of the aid their kin provided or whether they merely stayed with their parents because they possessed a stronger commitment to continuing their education and finding employment. I suspect that both conditions apply to some extent: women who receive family aid are more likely to advance economically, and those who wish to improve their position are more likely to look to their families for help.

There is some evidence that family support buffers the impact of single parenthood for the offspring as well. Earlier I observed that the children whose parents never married did not seem to be significantly worse off than the children whose parents had married but were no longer living together, although both groups of children did less well than the offspring of the stably married couples. When the children's circumstances were examined in greater detail, it appeared as though developmental difficulties were more likely to arise when the young mother was the full-time caretaker. When her childrearing responsibilities were shared by other family members, children scored higher on cognitive tests, experienced fewer behavioral problems, and manifested less anti-social behavior. These differences were slight and not entirely consistent and one might be inclined to dismiss them

as chance variations. However, they are noteworthy because other researchers have reported similar results.

In a review of existing studies on the impact of early childbearing on children, Baldwin and Cain (1980:39) conclude:

> Research on the role of family structure strongly suggests that the presence of adults other than the young mother in some way mitigates the deleterious health and other effects on the child associated with teenage childbearing.

It would seem then that by remaining in the family setting, many teenagers can reduce some of the hazards of early parenthood for themselves and their children. But are the risks merely transferred from the young mother to her family, spreading the economic and social disadvantage among her kin? No conclusive answers to that question can be provided at this time. The existing evidence indicates that early childbearing simultaneously brings burdens and benefits to the family of the adolescent parent.

The Impact of Early Childbearing on the Family

In collaboration with researchers at the Philadelphia Child Guidance Clinic, I conducted a series of 15 case studies of families whose daughters were going through the transition to adolescent parenthood. The families included blacks, Hispanics and whites who volunteered to participate in two taped sessions, one at the Child Guidance Clinic and one in their home. The Clinic interview brought various family members together to discuss the family's response to the pregnancy, their perceptions of how the event had altered family patterns, their participation in the support and care of the child, and their

future plans for raising the child. Themes that came up in the clinic discussion were followed up in separate home interviews of the participants. Needless to say, the data assembled, rich as it is, provides a very provisional view of the family's adaptation to early childbearing. The findings reported here should not be regarded as conclusive in any respect, but rather as suggestive of the kinds of issues that might be examined in future studies.

The case studies reinforce an impression gained from the longitudinal data collected in the Baltimore project, that parents are generally unprepared for the pregnancy and are usually angry and upset when they first learn that their daughter is expecting a child. While parents are aware that the majority of teenagers in their neighborhood are sexually active and may even suspect that their child may be having sexual relations, they typically deny the possibility that she might actually become pregnant. In fact, even after the pregnancy occurred to the subjects in the Baltimore study, most mothers, when asked if other adolescent daughters in their family might be having intercourse, answered no.

Most families, not just the ones in which a pregnancy occurs, experience great difficulty in discussing sexual matters (Litton-Fox, 1978). At best, they deal only indirectly with their child's changing sexual status; at worse, they avoid the topic altogether. Becuase of the problems parents face in providing sexual instruction, mothers and daughters often enter a tacit agreement to act as though intercourse will not occur. This in turn protects the parents from having to take

direct responsibility for preventing sexual relationships from occurring and frees the daughter to behave in a manner that might otherwise be inconsistent with her parents' wishes.

This act of collusion abruptly breaks down when conception occurs, although many parents may not learn of it for several months because of the daughter's reluctance to acknowledge the pregnancy. The process of revealing the pregnancy is anything but casual. The parents' reactions generally ranged from bitter recriminations to sad resignation, though a small minority of families reported that they were excited and happy about the prospect of having a baby in the household as soon as they heard the news.

Information is lacking on how the family's response affects the resolution of the pregnancy. We do not know the extent to which parents have input on the matter of whether or not an abortion is sought, but our impression is that families are frequently denied a role in the decision making, either because the adolescent conceals information about the pregnancy or because counsellors or physicians discourage her from consulting with family members. It is a highly debatable question who should have a say in the disposition of the pregnancy. It is clear that oftentimes the family is consulted only after the decision is made, even though they may bear major responsibility for supporting and caring for the child.

Assuming the pregnancy is brought to term, in almost all instances the family is inevitably drawn into caring for the child. Regardless of their initial disappointment over the pregnancy, most

families quickly gave way to expressing excitment about having a new child in the household, assuming their daughter elected to remain in the home. At this stage, different family members, not always in consultation with one another, began to make plans for raising the child.

One of the most intriguing findings of the qualitative case studies is the recurrent dilemma of how to allocate the rights and obligations to the child among these various parties. Not infrequently, the father of the child and his family wished to assume some measure of responsibility but were thwarted by the young mother's family. Because the mother and child remained in the home, parents often felt they had the right to establish ground rules which restricted the father's access to their daughter and grandchild. This in turn led a few of the fathers to press the adolescents to marry them and move out of the parental home. The young mother's failure to do so resulted in the retreat of some of the males from their initial intention to help raise the child. This, in turn, severed the child's relationship to paternal kin.

As I indicated earlier, most young mothers undoubtedly calculated that they could expect more support from their parents and siblings than would be forthcoming from the fathers' side, though the lucky ones managed to receive assistance from both family lines. The maternal relatives offered singular incentives for staying put. In the first place, the adolescent often enjoyed an elevation in status in the household after the child was born. Being a mother

meant that she received a variety of considerations from other family members. Her kin extended favors to her, sometimes lavishing attention on her and her child. This in turn created a climate of good feeling which had frequently been absent up to the point of pregnancy. More than a few families described a new spirit of cooperation in the household, tracing it to the birth of the child, a time when everyone pitched in and helped out. As one young mother told us:

> We're closer now. [We] can relate better. I was immature when I first got pregnant. Now they [referring to her family] show me more respect.... [Before] I wanted to get out of the house because of my problems and now I enjoy staying home.

From the perspective of the young mother, her family became indispensable to her daily existence. Her parents provided advice and assistance in caring for the child, thus in effect, establishing an apprenticeship in parenthood. Her siblings often filled in for her, watching the baby when she attended classes or resumed her social life. In some of the families we observed, an elaborate system of childcare had been worked out with certain family members regularly assuming certain duties; in other households the division of labor was improvised and in flux.

In most of our case studies, there was little indication of conflict over parenting duties. Either the adolescent mother assumed the major responsibility or she shared it with other members of the household. In several instances, however, usually where childcare responsibilities were vaguely defined, strains between the adolescent parent and her collaborators within the family were readily apparent. A few grandmothers complained that they were saddled with unwelcome

childcare tasks, while several others, according to the young mothers, usurped their role by assuming too much responsibility. When the members of one family were asked who was principally responsible for looking after the baby, everyone's hand immediately shot up. Two of the young mother's siblings began a rancorous discussion over who did more for the child, and the baby's grandmother eventually entered the argument by insisting that she was the individual in charge. In the meanwhile, the young mother looked on passively. In this family and several others, we gained the impression that the family, because of longstanding organizational difficulties, had not been able to respond to the challenge of incorporating the new family member. (The organizational impact of early childbearing on the family is described in greater detail in previous papers. See Furstenberg, 1980a, and Furstenberg, in press.)

When families mobilized successfully to meet this challenge, there were sizable dividends for various members. The pregnancy forestalled in some families the emptying of the nest, a stage which some older women did not entirely relish. More than a few of the grandmothers reported that the arrival of the baby made them feel young again. Several stated that the responsibility of caring for the child had temporarily rejuvenated their marriages by re-involving their husbands in family obligations.

Not all of the parents reacted in this manner. Some women felt that the pregnancy deprived them of freedom from childcare responsibilities. Typically, these individuals held jobs outside the

home and were caught between their desires to help their daughter out and to maintain their commitment to the workplace. On occasion, siblings or other relatives stepped in to fill the breach, sparing a wrenching choice for the conflicted grandmother.

The assistance rendered by the parents frequently dampened conflicts which had flared up during the daughter's adolescence. In some families, parents reported that they were getting along with their daughters for the first time in years. They held that having a baby made the daughter behave more like an adult; whether this change was real or imagined hardly mattered; it had the consequence of bringing the adolescent back into the fold. In the Baltimore study, twice as many adolescents reported that family relations had improved than claimed that they had deteriorated in the year following delivery.

The reduction of tensions between the adolescent and her parents was not always an unmixed blessing for other members of the household. The young mother's gain could be her siblings' loss, for the locus of conflict sometimes shifted to another child in the family. Younger siblings, displaced by the newborn, occasionally reacted by clamoring for attention or withdrawing for the lack of it. The adolescent parent who may have been the former family scapegoat sometimes passed the mantle on to a younger sibling who became the new "problem child." In one family we studied, an older sibling, marginal to begin with and made more so by her sister's pregnancy, became pregnant herself in a matter of months after the first child was born.

In summary, the ramifications of early childbearing are numerous

and diverse. They take different forms in different families, and the effects vary depending on which family members we examine. Moreover, there is reason to suspect that the impact on the family is neither consistent nor continuous. Our case studies were carried out during what might be described as the honeymoon phase, the least problematic period of childcare. The infant was a novelty, was relatively undemanding, and was an object of gratification. How different will the family's response to the child be in years to come when the youngster becomes less adorable? As we were told by one of the young mother's siblings, "I like little babies. When they get big like mine, (they become) little monsters."

How families allocate childcare responsibilities over time and how different divisions of labor influence the development of the child are questions that remain totally unexplored by researchers. The data from the Baltimore study provide a clue to the extent of change that is likely to occur. A majority of the infants had experienced considerable shifts in the composition of the household and, probably, in their caretakers. Only a third of the young mothers had remained in the same family situation throughout the study, while more than a fourth had experienced at least two major transitions (such as leaving home to marry and then moving from a broken marriage to an independent household). How much these moves affected the continuity of care provided to the child is not known. More important still, we cannot say from the available data how shifts in childcare arrangements influence the child's cognitive and emotional well-being.

Conclusion

The research which I carried out on the role of the family in mediating the impact of early childbearing for the mother and child is far too preliminary to provide a reliable basis for policy recommendations. Yet, to call for more research without providing any guidelines for policy makers seems as irresponsible as it would be to try to draw firm conclusions from provisional findings. So, I will attempt to formulate some tentative recommendations while we await the more systematic studies which will reveal the wisdom of these initiatives.

Before examining ways of strengthening the family's already considerable role in rendering assistance to the young mother and her child, let us take note of the conspicuous absence of such approaches in efforts to prevent unwanted pregnancies. While lipservice is given to the importance of providing sex education in the home, little assistance is offered to parents confronted with the task. At best, school-based programs consult parents in designing a curriculum but rarely are parents included in the educational program itself. Family planning clinics generally by-pass parents, fearing interference or resistance from the family.

A certain amount of evidence indicates that adolescents are less likely to use birth control when they initiate sexual relations if their families disapprove of premarital sex and if there has been little or no discussion in the home about sexuality and contraception (Furstenberg, 1971; and Litton-Fox, 1978). What would happen if efforts

were made to equip family members (parents and/or siblings) with the skills needed to communicate with the adolescent about sexual decision making? If this idea sounds far-fetched, it might be worth noting that the Family Planning Council of Southeastern Pennsylvania had initiated such a program with teenagers who visit family planning clinics. While the program has just gotten underway, there are early indications that, when given the opportunity, most teenagers are receptive to the idea of involving one or more family members in a program to build support for their decision to use contraception, although, obviously, not all are prepared to have their parents participate.

While this particular program may or may not work it suggests that there is tremendous room for innovation in extending sex education to the family context. It is easy to imagine that the mass media might be encouraged to devise means of educating families through special instructional programs. Similarly, schools might offer courses especially designed for parents or for entire family units which could augment the classes now being developed for adolescents and pre-adolescents.

Even if dramatic improvements were made in techniques for educating teenagers and their families about the responsibilities of becoming sexually active, unwanted pregnancies are going to occur, given limitations of existing means of contraception. When conception occurs, should the family be involved in the resolution of the pregnancy? While I do not believe that parents ought to be notified by agencies offering pregnancy counseling to the teenage client without her consent, there is much room for re-orienting the individualistic approach of most services

which discouraged the family's participation in deliberations regarding the resolution of the pregnancy. The family's interests are affected by the pregnancy and should be carefully weighed when alternatives such as abortion or adoption are considered.

Parent education, vocational counseling, and contraceptive programs for adolescents have also ignored the family's vital role as a support system. Rather than building on such assistance, they have generally circumvented it. Childcare classes rarely reach out to other caretakers in the family, though other relatives may actually be taking a more active role in raising the child than the young mother herself. Instructional materials providing advice to young parents are hopelessly unrealistic, in some cases even harmful, because they do not recognize that adolescent mothers are usually raising the child in collaboration with other family members. In fact, as I pointed out earlier, we know little about the styles of collaboration that develop within families and how they affect the development of the child. Even in the absence of further research, we can safely assume that parent education programs should be widened to include the family, and materials on motherhood revised to take into account the important part that the larger kin network plays in childrearing.

An even more serious deficiency in our present policies is the economic incentives provided to the adolescent for establishing a separate household. Welfare regulations in some localities are designed to encourage the young parent to move out of the family rather than to enable her to remain with her parents should she choose to do

so. A reassessment of economic assistance programs is needed to ensure that the adolescent has freedom of choice. I would even go so far as to advocate that we make it easier for her to remain in the home if evidence continues to show that she and her child do better when they reside in an extended family setting.

Though we have a certain nostalgia about the extended family in times past, the popular stereotype of its modern counterpart often is far less positive. Particularly as it is found among urban minorities, complex kinship arrangements are sometimes viewed by the public as undesirable deviations from the ideal of the nuclear unit. No doubt there are special problems inherent in complex families, just as there are in nuclear systems. However, we need not romanticize the extended family system to recognize that it plays a vital role in reducing the strains associated with early parenthood. Our efforts at intervention, whether they be to prevent unwanted pregnancy or to minimize its harmful effects, are likely to have much greater success if we stop treating the family as an indifferent party or, worse yet, a dangerous nuisance and begin regarding the kinship system as a potent and useful ally.

Bibliography

Baldwin, W. H. 1976.
"Adolescent Pregnancy and Childbearing--Growing Concerns for Americans," Population Bulletin, Vol. 31, No. 2.

Baldwin, Wendy, and Virginia S. Cain. 1980.
"The Children of Teenage Parents," Family Planning Perspectives, Vol. 12, No. 1.

Chilman, C. S. 1979.
Adolescent Sexuality in a Changing American Society. DHEW Publication No. (NIH) 79-1426, Washington, D.C.

Crawford, Albert G. and Frank F. Furstenberg, Jr. 1979.
"The Long-Term Consequences of Early Childbearing for Women's Social Networks." Presented at the 1979 Meeting of the Eastern Sociological Society, March 23.

Furstenberg, Frank F., Jr. 1971.
"Birth Control Experience Among Pregnant Adolescents: The Process of Unplanned Parenthood," Social Problems, Vol. 19, No. 2.

Furstenberg, Frank F., Jr. 1976.
Unplanned Parenthood: The Social Consequences of Teenage Childbearing. New York: The Free Press. (Paperback edition, 1979.)

Furstenberg, Frank F., Jr. 1980a.
"Burdens and Benefits: The Impact of Early Childbearing on the Family," Journal of Social Issues, forthcoming.

Furstenberg, Frank F., Jr. 1980b.
"Children's Names and Paternal Claims: Bonds Between Unmarried Fathers and Their Children," Journal of Family Issues, Vol. 1, No. 1.

Furstenberg, Frank F., Jr. In Press.
"Implicating the Family: Teenage Parenthood and Kinship Involvement," Teenage Pregnancy and Family Impact: Implications for Policy (tentative title), Theodora Ooms, ed. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

Furstenberg, Frank F., Jr., Richard Lincoln and Jane Menken, eds. In Press.
Perspectives on Teenage Sexuality, Pregnancy, and Childbearing. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Litton-Fox, Greer. 1978.
"The Family's Role in Adolescent Sexual Behavior," Family Impact Seminar, Washington, D.C.

Modell, John, Frank F. Furstenberg, Jr. and Douglas Strong. 1978.
"The Timing of Marriage in the Transition to Adulthood: Continuity and Change, 1860-1975," American Journal of Sociology, Vol. 84, Supplement, entitled Turning Points: Historical and Sociological Essays on the Family, John Demos and Sarane Spence Boocock, eds. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

O'Connell, Martin, and Maurice J. Moore. 1980.
"The Legitimacy Status of First Births To U.S. Women Aged 15-24," Family Planning Perspectives, Vol. 12, No. 1.

Ooms, Theodora, and Teresa Maciocha. 1979.
"Teenage Pregnancy and Family Impact: New Perspectives on Policy," Family Impact Seminar, Washington, D.C.

Ooms, Theodora (ed.). In Press.
Teenage Pregnancy and Family Impact: Implications for Policy (tentative title). Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

Sklar, June, and Beth Berkov. 1974.
"Teenage Family Formation in Postwar America," Family Planning Perspectives, Vol. 6, No. 2.

Zelnik, Melvin, and John F. Kantner. 1977.
"Sexual and Contraceptive Experience of Young Unmarried Women in the United States, 1976 and 1971," Family Planning Perspectives, Vol. 9, No. 2.